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SIPDIS

For US Treasury Virginia Cantor

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL GT WHA PDA

SUBJECT: Vital Voices Meets With Guatemalan Women

1. (U) Summary: Vital Voices Global Partnership held a two-day Women's Leadership Retreat in Guatemala City in July. Present at the conference were approximately 40 women leaders from diverse backgrounds. The Ambassador hosted a reception in honor of the group attended by more than 100 women and civic leaders. The goal is of a democratic Guatemala with an educated, uncompromising populace that will weed out corruption and promote transparency, ethics, and freedom. The women were passionate about their country and exuded relentless perseverance to reform institutions, legal frameworks, and even societal mindsets. End Summary.

Vital Voices Global Partnership in Guatemala

2. (U) The two-day conference itinerary focused on techniques and channels for women's leadership and ethics in a democratic society, a strategies to combat trafficking in women and children. The facilitators were joined by Virginia Cantor, Senior Counsel for Ethics at the Department of Treasury. They provided thought-provoking questions and moderated discussions of the Guatemalan women leaders. Their technique was to create a forum conducive to openly and candidly sharing stories, thoughts, beliefs, strategies, plans, and actions; their modus operandi was extremely effective, and led to stimulating and honest dialogue and a successful conference.

The Vision of Guatemalan Women

3. (U) POL Intern attended three hours of the conference and was struck by the courage and tenacity of the Guatemalan women. Among the 40 participants there were indigenous and ladino women, educators, lawyers, health workers, political staffers, journalists, veterinarians, and business, government, and nonprofit leaders. They were from cities and rural areas with different upbringings, educational backgrounds, experiences, and opportunities. They shared the same characteristics of leadership; they were articulate and spoke with clarity and authority. They shared the same vision for Guatemala and were willing to dedicate their lives in order to realize this dream.

4. (U) In their discussion of ethics and corruption they touched upon sexual harassment by labor inspectors in the factories, bribery, misuse of government funds at the local and federal levels, wasting of time, depriving people of education as a tactic to concentrate power, and lack of access to power. One of the most poignant quotes aptly summarizing the thoughts and desires of the women present: "We need to prioritize collective interests over personal interests. We need to reconstruct the social fabric that has been so fragmented. New generations need to be taught these principles. Development is integral for all people, not only a few. We must become agents for change because the country demands it. This is for our children. We need to promote the rights of human beings to live different lives." Another woman stated, "I hope when we leave here we have strategies."

Future Action

5. (U) As a result of the conference, the women formed four commissions which will work to develop public relations and gain financial support. The commissions will meet to review the proposed political agenda for the ongoing electoral process. They plan to set an agenda that will become the basis for their joint efforts towards more democratic and prosperous Guatemala. Coalition members have contacted other groups and individuals to build their alliance for which they hope will be a national women's movement.

Comments

6. (U) The Guatemalan women who convened for this conference possess the passion and intellect necessary to promote economic development and a democratic reform in their country. They demonstrated the capacity to construct abstract theories and principles, strategize and plan, and translate their blueprints into action. These women exhibited great promise as current and future leaders in Guatemala. The conference mobilized, strengthened, and equipped these women for the challenge ahead.

HAMILTON